Nan of Music Mountain

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

Frank Hamilton Spearman is America's foremost writer of railroad adventure stories, and his work is in constant demand by leading periodicals and publishing houses. For a number of years he was a railroader in the Rocky mountain country, and the robust fascination of that life is reflected in this serial. We believe that you surely will enjoy "Nan of Music Mountain," because the characters are unusually impressive, the plot well made and the movement vigorous.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

—1—

Frontier Day.

Lefever sat sidewise on the edge of the table. His subdued whistle, which seemed meditative, irritated De Spain more or less, despite his endeavor not to be irritated. It was like the low singing of a teakettle, which, however unobtrusive, indicates steam within. In fact, John Lefever, who was built not unlike a kettle, never whistled except when there was some pressure on his sensibilities.

The warm sun came streaming through the windows of the private office of the division superintendent at Sleepy Cat, a railroad town lying almost within gunshot of the great continental divide. De Spain, tilted back in the superintendent's chair, sat near Lefever—Jeffries had the mountain division then—his feet crossed on the walnut rim of the shabby, cloth-topped table. His chin lay on his soft, open collar and tie, his sunburnt lips were shut tight, and his nervous brown eyes were staring at the dull finish barrel of a new rifle, that lay across Lefever's lap. At intervals Lefever took the rifle up and, whistling softly, examined with care a fracture of the lever, the broken thumbpiece of which lay on the table between the two men.

From the Main street side of the large room came the hooting and clattering of a Frontier day celebration, and these noises seemed not to allay the discomfort apparent on the faces of the two men.

"Hang it, John," blurted out De Spain peevishly, "what possessed you to send for me to do the shooting, anyway?"

His companion answered gently—Lefever's patience was noted even among contained men—"Henry," he remonstrated, "I sent for you because I thought you could shoot."

De Spain's expression did not change under the reproach. His features were so regular as to contribute to this undisturbed expression, and his face would not ordinarily attract attention but for his extremely bright and alive eyes—the frequent mark of an out-of-door mountain life—and especially for a red birthmark, low on his left cheek, disappearing under the turn of the jaw. It was merely a strawberry, so called, and after knowing him, one forgot about the birthmark in the man that carried it. Lefever's reproach was naturally provocative. "I hope now," retorted De Spain, but without any show of resentment, "you understand I can't."

"No," persisted Lefever, good-naturedly, "I only realize, Henry, that this wasn't your day for the job."

The door of the outer office opened, and Jeffries, the superintendent, walked into the room; he had just come from Medicine Bend in his car. The two men rose to greet him. He asked about the noise in the street.

"That noise, William, comes from all Calabasas and all Morgan's gap," explained Lefever, still fondling the rifle. "The Morgans are celebrating our defeat. They put it all over us. We were challenged yesterday," he continued in response to the abrupt questions of Jeffries. "The Morgans offered to shoot us offhand, two hundred yards, bull's-eye count. I thought we could trim them by running in a real gunman, so I wired to Medicine Bend for Henry. Henry comes up last night with a brand-new rifle. This is the gun. The lever," he added with a patient expletive, "broke. Henry got to shooting too fast."

"That wasn't what beat me," exclaimed De Spain curtly. And taking up the offending rifle, he walked out of the room.

"What do you think, William?" Lefever grumbled on. "The Morgans ran in a girl to shoot against us—Nan Morgan, old Duke Morgan's little niece. And I never before in my life saw Henry so fussed. The little Music Mountain skirt simply put it all over him. She had five bull's-eyes to Henry's three when the lever snapped. He forfeited."

"Some shooting," commented Jeffries, rapidly signing letters.

"We expected some when Henry unslung his gun," Lefever went on without respecting Jeffries' preoccupation. "As it is, those fellows have cleaned up every dollar loose in Sleepy Cat, and then some. Money? They could start a bank this minute."

Sounds of revelry continued to pour in through the street window. The Morgans were celebrating uncommonly. "Jubbing it in, eh, John?" suggested Jeffries.

"Think of it," gasped Lefever, "to be beaten by an eighteen-year-old girl."

"Now that," declared Jeffries, waking up as if for the first time interested, "is exactly where you made your mistake, John. A gunman shoots his best when there's somebody shooting at him. That's why you shoot well—because you're a gunman, and not a marksman."

"That boy can shoot all around me, Jeff."

"For instance," continued Jeffries, "if you had put Gale Morgan up against Henry, and told him to shoot at each other, instead of against each other, you'd have got bull's-eyes to burn from De Spain. And the Calabasas crowd wouldn't have your money. John, if you want to win money, you must study the psychological."

There was abundance of raillery in Lefever's retort: "That's why you are rich, Jeff?"

"No, I am poor because I failed to study it. That is why I am at Sleepy Cat holding down a division. But now that you've brought Henry up here, we'll keep him."

"What do you mean, keep him?" demanded Lefever, starting in protest.

"I mean I need him. I mean the time to shoot a bear is when you see him. John, what kind of a fellow is De Spain?" demanded the superintendent, as if he had never heard of him.

Lefever, regarding Jeffries keenly, exclaimed with emphasis: "Why, if you want him short and sharp, he's a man with a soft eye and a snap-turtle jaw, a man of close squeaks and short-arm shots, always getting into trouble, always getting out; a man that can wheedle more out of a horse than anybody but an Indian; coax more shots out of a gun than anybody else can put into it—if you want him flat, that's Henry, as I size him."

Jeffries resumed his mildest tone: "Tell him to come in a minute, John."

De Spain himself expressed contemptuous impatience when Lefever told him the superintendent wanted him to go to work at Sleepy Cat. He declared he had always hated the town, raised one objection after another to leaving Medicine Bend, and Jeffries finally summoned a show of impatience.

"You are looking for promotion, aren't you?" he demanded threateningly.

"Yes, but not for motion without the 'pro,'" objected De Spain. "I want to stick to the railroad business. You want to get me into the stage business."

"Temporarily, yes. But I've told you when you come back to the division proper, you come as my assistant, if you make good running the Thief River stages. Think of the salary."

"I have no immediate heirs."

"This is not a matter for joking, De Spain."

"I know that, too. How many men have been shot on the stages in the last six months?"

"Why, now and again the stages are held up, yes," admitted Jeffries brusquely; "that is to be expected where the specie shipments are large. The Thief River mines are rotten with gold just now. But you don't have to drive a stage. We supply you with good men for that, and good guards—men willing to take any kind of a chance if the pay is right. And the pay is right, and yours as general manager will be right."

"I have never as yet generally managed any stage line," remarked De Spain, poking ridicule at the title, "no matter how modest an outfit."

"You will never learn younger. We must have a man to run that line that can curb the disorders along the route. Calabasas valley, De Spain, is a bad place."

"Is it?" De Spain asked as naively as if he had never heard of Calabasas, though Jeffries was nervily stating a fact bald and notorious to both.

"There are a lot of bad men there," Jeffries went on, "who are bad simply because they've never had a man to show them."

"The last 'general' manager was killed there, wasn't he?"

"Not in the valley, no. He was shot at Calabasas inn."

"Would that make very much difference in the way he felt about it?"

Jeffries, with an effort, laughed. "That's all right, Henry! They won't get you." Again he extended his finger dogmatically: "If I thought they would, I wouldn't send you down there."

"Thank you."

"You are young, ambitious—four thousand a year isn't hanging from every telegraph pole; it is almost twice what they are paying me."

"You're not getting shot at."

"No man, Henry, knows the hour of his death. No man in the high country knows when he is to be made a target—that you well understand. Men are shot down in this country that have no more idea of getting killed than I have—or you have."

"Don't include me. I have a pretty good idea of getting killed right away—the minute I take this job."

"We have temporized with this Calabasas outfit long enough," declared Jeffries, dropping his mask at last. "Deaf Sandusky, Logan and that squint-eyed thief, Dave Sassoon—all hold-up men, every one of them! Henry, I'm putting you in on that job because you've got nerve, because you can shoot, because I don't think they can get you—and paying you a whaling big salary to straighten things out along the Spanish Sinks. Do you know, Henry—" Jeffries leaned forward and lowered his tone. Master of the art of persuading and convincing, of hammering and pounding, of swaying the doubting and deciding the undecided, the strong-eyed mountain man looked his best as he held the younger man under his spell. "Do you know," he repeated, "I suspect that Morgan's Gap bunch are really behind and beneath a lot of this deviltry around Calabasas? You take Gale Morgan—why, he trains with Dave Sassoon; take his uncle, Duke—Sassoon never is in trouble but what Duke will help him out." Jeffries exploded with a slight but forcible expletive. "Was there ever a thief or a robber driven into Morgan's gap that didn't find sympathy and shelter with some of the Morgans? I believe they are in every game pulled on the Thief river stages."

"As bad as that?"

Jeffries turned to his desk. "Ask John Lefever."

De Spain had a long talk with John. But John was a poor adviser. He advised no one on any subject. He whistled, he hummed a tune. He extended his arm, at times, suddenly, as if on the brink of a positive assertion. He decided nothing, and asserted nothing. But concerning the Morgans and their friends, he did abandon his habitual reticence. "Rustlers, thieves, robbers, coiners, outlaws!" he exclaimed energetically.

"Is this because they got your money today, John?" asked De Spain.

"Never mind my money. I've got a new job with nothing to do, and plenty of cash."

De Spain asked what the job was. "On the stages," announced Lefever. "I am now general superintendent of the Thief River line."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that I am to be your assistant."

"I'm not going to take that job, John."

Lefever took off his hat and twirled it skillfully on one hand, humming softly the while.

"I believe you'd better change your mind, Henry, and stay with us."

"No," returned De Spain meditatively, "I'm not going to stay. I've

"Some Shooting!" Commented Jeffries.

had glory enough out of this town for a while." He picked up his hat, poked the crown discontentedly, and, rising with a loss of amiability in his features and manner, walked out of the room.

The late sun was streaming down the full length of Main street. The street was still filled with loiterers who had spent the day at the fair, and lingered now in town in the vague hope of seeing a brawl or a fight before sundown—roisterers from the Spanish Sinks, and gunmen and gamblers from Calabasas and Morgan's gap. The Morgans themselves and their following were out to the last retainer.

CHAPTER II.

De Spain Changes His Mind.

Before De Spain had walked far he heard music from the open-air dancing pavilion in Grant street. Stirred by an idle curiosity, he turned the corner and stopped to watch the crowded couples whirling up and down the raised platform under paper lanterns and red streamers to the music of an automatic piano. He took his place in a fringe of onlookers that filled the sidewalk. But he was thinking as he stood, not of the boisterous dancing or the clumsy dancers, but of the broken lever and the defeat at the fairgrounds. It still rankled in his mind. While he stood thinking the music ceased.

A man, who appeared to be in authority, walked to the center of the dancing-floor, made an announcement that De Spain failed to catch, and looked toward a young couple standing in an attitude of waiting at the head of the hall.

All eyes being turned their way, De Spain's attention as well was drawn toward them. The man was powerful in stature, and rather too heavy, but straight as an Indian. His small, reddish face was tanned by the sun and wind, and from the handsome hat down to the small, high-heeled and spurred boots, he wore the distinctive cowboy rig of the mountains. De Spain seemed to recall that this particular fellow had crowed the loudest when he himself forfeited the shooting-match earlier in the day.

But De Spain, unamiable as he now was, looked with unconcealed interest at the man's dancing partner. She, too, was browned by the mountain sun and air—a slight, erect girl, her head well set, and a delicate waistline above a belted, brown skirt, which just reached the tops of her small, high tan riding boots. She wore a soft, French-gray Stetson hat. Her eyes, noticeably pretty, wandered about the platform, reflecting in their unrest the dissatisfied expression of her face. A talkative woman standing just in front of De Spain, told a companion that the man was Gale Morgan, a nephew of Satterlee, laziest of the Morgans. De Spain at once recognized in the dancing partner the little Music Mountain girl who had been his undoing at the target.

The energetic piano thumped the strains of a two-step. Gale Morgan extended his arm toward Nan; she looked very slight at his side. Then, responding with a sort of fiery impatience to her partner's guiding, she caught the rapid step of the music, and together the two swept down the floor. The spectators soon showed their admiration of the dancing with unrestrained handclapping, and followed with approving outcries. Every swaying step, every agile turn proved how sure Nan was of herself, and how perfectly her body answered to every exaction of the quick movement of the dance. Gale Morgan seemed the merest attendant for his partner, who, with quickened pulses, gave herself up more and more to the lively call of the music.

Once the two swung away out, near to De Spain's corner. As Nan whirled by, De Spain, either with the infection of the music or from her nearness to him, caught his breath. His eyes riveted themselves on her flushed face as she passed—oblivious of his presence—and he recalled how in the morning she had handled her rifle in the same, quick, sure way. De Spain could not dance at all; but no one could successfully accuse him of not knowing how to handle any sort of a gun. It was only now he forgave her, unasked, the humiliation she had put on him. He felt an impulse to go up to her—now that she had stopped dancing—and congratulate her honestly, instead of boorishly as he had done at the match.

But while he thought of this the two dancers disappeared, and a new and rougher party crowded out on the floor.

"Now, isn't that a pretty bunch!" exclaimed the talkative woman again. "That's the Calabasas gang. Look at Sandusky, that big fellow, with the crooked jaw. And Harvey Logan, with his black hair plastered over his eyes. Why, for one drink those two fellows would turn loose on this crowd and kill half a dozen. And there's two of Duke Morgan's cowboys with them, boozing old Bull Page, and that squint-eyed Sassoon—he's worse than the others, that fellow—a fine bunch to allow in this town."

It had become second nature to De Spain to note even insignificant details concerning men, and he took an interest in and remarked how very low Logan carried his gun in front of his hip. Sandusky's holster was slung higher and farther back on the side. Logan wore a tan shirt and khaki. Sandusky, coatless, was dressed in a white shirt, with a red tie, and wore a soiled, figured waistcoat fastened at the bottom by a cut-glass button.

The Sleepy Cat gossip commented on how much money these men had been spending all day. She wondered aloud, reckless apparently of consequences, who had been robbed, lately, to provide it. Her companion scolded her for stirring up talk that might make trouble; averred she didn't believe half the stories she heard; asserted that these men lived quietly at Calabasas, minding their own affairs. "And they're kind to poor folks, too." "Sure" grimaced the obdurate one, "with other people's money."

De Spain, discontented, turning again into Main street, continued on to the Thief River stage barn. After looking the horses over and inspecting the wagons with a new but mild curiosity, awakened by Jeffries' proposal, De Spain walked back toward the station. He had virtually decided not to take the job. Medicine Bend was his home. He knew every man, woman and child in the town. Before the tragic death of his father, his mother had lived there, and De Spain had grown up in the town and gone to school there. He was a railroad man, anyway—a modest trainmaster—and not eager for stage-line management.

As he passed Grant street again he encountered a party on horseback heading for the river bridge. Three of the men were riding abreast and a little ahead. Of these, the middle horseman was a spare man of frankly disreputable air. His face was drawn up into a one-sided smile. Satt Morgan's smile was habitual and lessened his stern aspect. At his right rode his cousin, Duke Morgan, older, shorter and stouter. His square, heavy-jawed, smooth-shaven face was lighted by hard, keen eyes, and finished by an uncompromising chin. Duke was the real head of the clan, of which there were numerous branches in the Superstition mountains, all looking with friendliness or enmity to the Morgans of Morgan's gap.

The yellow-haired man riding on the left, with a red face and red-lidded, squinting eyes, showed none of the blood of his companions. But David Sassoon, the Calabasas gambler, quondam cowboy, and chronic brawler, stood in some way close to the different Morgans, and was reputed to have got each of them, at different times, out of more than one troublesome affair, either by sheer force of arms, or through his resourceful cunning.

These men were followed by a younger man riding with a very young woman. De Spain knew none of the front-rank men, but he knew well Nan Morgan and her dancing partner. Gale's face lighted as he set eyes on De Spain, and he spoke quickly to Nan: "There's your handsome Medicine Bend gunman!"

Nan, glancing toward De Spain, seemed aware that he heard. She looked away. De Spain tightened up with a rage. The blood rushed to his face, the sarcasm struck in. If the birthmark could have deepened with humiliation it would have done so at the instant of the cold, inspection of the girl's pretty eyes. Gale, calling ahead to the others, invited their attention to the man on the street corner. De Spain only stood still, returning their inspection as insolently as silence could. Each face was faithfully photographed and filed in his memory, and his steady gaze followed them until they rode down the hill and clattered jauntily out on the swaying suspension bridge that still crosses the Rat river at Grant street, and connects the whole south country—the Spanish sinks, the Thief River gold fields, the saw-toothed Superstition range, Morgan's gap, and Music mountain with Sleepy Cat and the railroad.

De Spain, walking down Grant street, watched the party disappear among the hills across the river. The encounter had stirred him. He already hated the Morgans, at least all except the blue-eyed girl, and she, it was not difficult to divine from her expression, was, at least, disdainful of her morning rival.

Reaching the station platform while still busy with his thoughts, De Spain encountered Jeffries and Lefever.

"Jeffries, I'll take that Thief River stage job," announced De Spain bluntly.

"What's the reason that fellow changed his mind?" demanded Jeffries, when Lefever joined him later in his office.

"Don't ask me," frowned Lefever perplexed. "Don't ask me. Henry is odd in some ways. You can't tell what's going on inside that fellow's head by looking at the outside of it." Jeffries grunted coldly at this bit of wisdom. "I'll tell you what I should think—if I had to think: Henry de Spain has never found out rightly who was responsible for the death of his father. He expects to do it, some time; and long ago some of these same Morgans lived on the Peace river above his father's ranch."

What steps do you think De Spain will take to get accurate information about the Morgan gang and begin his campaign against them? Will he go himself as a spy into their stronghold near Calabasas? Or will he attempt to make love to Nan Morgan and use her as a tool?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Worked Both Ways.

White—So Green is applying for a divorce from the widow he married a month ago, is he? Whatever possessed him to marry her, anyway?

Brown—Her wonderful conversational powers, I believe.

White—And why is he applying for a divorce so soon?

Brown—Oh, for the same reason.

Grecian Dolls.

As one might expect, the little Greek girls had beautiful dolls. They were made of clay and wax and decorated with bright colors. They had beautiful garments which could be put on and taken off at will, and some of them were made to represent the gods and heroes so much revered by the people. They were not stiff creatures, but had movable limbs.

LOVE THRIVES ON EUGENICS

Marriages in Milwaukee Are on the Increase Despite Law Against Unfit.

Marriage goes merrily on in Milwaukee, regardless of the eugenics law, says the Sentinel of that city.

Figures in the county clerk's office show an increase in both 1915 and 1916 over 1914 in the number of licenses issued. The eugenics law, in operation for three years, has had no effect upon the celebration of the time-honored nuptials.

"I still maintain that the eugenics law has been of tremendous benefit to the people of the state," declared Mrs. G. A. Hipke, sponsor for the law. "It is asserted that doctors make only superficial tests of men who come to them for examination before marriage, but I contend that no conscientious physician could pass upon a case which might later bring results that would reflect upon his earlier judgment."

Mrs. Hipke declared that, while she had no present intention of agitating any change in the law she might consider a broadening of the law that would include the women as well as the men in the prenuptial examination.

Bonus System in Japan.

The highest salaried man in Japan does not receive enough money in that form to pay for gasoline used by his automobile, for salaries of the managers of business corporations are insignificantly small, says the Japan Times. Salaries, however, are not the total income of business men. Under the Japanese custom there is a liberal bonus system, and the bonus amounts to 300 or 400 times the monthly salary in some cases.

The Mitsui company is regarded as the biggest corporation in Japan and their directors are noted for their large incomes. Each director is said to receive in the form of a bonus about $100,000 a year, although his salary may be only $250 a month.

More than 70 per cent of the exports of Jamaica come to the United States.